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ASI, MORAD OSMAN

ARABS, ISRAELIS AND U. S. TELEVISION NETWORKS: A CONTENT ANALYSIS OF HOW ABC, CBS, AND NBC REPORTED THE NEWS BETWEEN 1970-1979

Ohio University PH.D. 1981

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ARABS, ISRAELIS AND U.S. TELEVISION NETWORKS: A CONTENT ANALYSIS OF HOW ABC, CBS AND NBC REPORTED THE NEWS BETWEEN 1970-1979

A Dissertation Presented to
The Faculty of the College of Communication of
Ohio University

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Philosophy

by
Morad O. Asi
March, 1981

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This dissertation has been approved

for the School of Journalism

and the College of Communication by

Professor of Journalism

Dean of the College of Communication

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DEDICATION

This research effort is dedicated to the loving memories of my father MOHAMMED OSMAN SAÚD ASI and to my brother AHMED ALI

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

There are several people whom I want to thank for making this research possible. My Ph.D. committee deserves my highest regards. Some went beyond the call of duty. Professor Guido Stempel, my main adviser, who supervised and offered his expertise and knowledge during the various stages of this study, Dr. Drew McDaniels who offered the video equipment and other help to me and Dr. Gifford Doxsee who helped me locate literature sources; to all a sincere thank you.

My thanks also should be extended to Vanderbilt University's Television News Archives management for their cooperation and efficiency. Also to Dr. Craig Farrar of the Ohio University Computer Center for his help generating the many computer "runs" yielding the statistical computations for this dissertation.

Finally, I wish to thank my wife Debbie (Dalal) for her patience and help, most of all persistence and my 4-year old son Ahmed Andy, who "helped" me become a "writing doctor."

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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

> The new Arab world strongly resents the cultural imperialism it perceives in Western attitudes. Perhaps you are not aware of this imperialism, and most certainly not of its extent.... I tell you that you have to be an Arab to be aware of the full impact of anti-Arab anti-semitism. In novels, films and television programs, Arabs are inevitably stupid, evil and lazy.... I really think it is time for the anti-defamation league to extend its activities to cover the defamation of Arabs. Jews and Arabs are cousins after all.[1]

Such complaints about western negative attitudes and stereotypes toward the Arabs are not uncommon. Arab intellectuals and government officials often complain and document anti-Arab coverage in the western media. With thousands of Arab students, tourists and others flocking to western capitals, Arabs are becoming sensitive to the negative, anti-Arab stereotypes in mass media coverage. Such awareness and sensitivity culminated in a Georgetown University Symposium on "The American Media and the Arabs " held in April 1979. American mass media representatives, journalists, and many Arab-American scholars attended the two-day symposium. That same year, a similar conference-seminar was held in London,

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[1]Ghazi Algosaibi, "Exploding the Myths: How the West Views the Arabs," Arab News, July 25, 1979, p. 17.

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England, addressed "The Arab Image in the U.S. Mass Media."[2] This conference was attended by such personalities as Edward Heath, former British Prime Minister, Mohammed Hassanein Haykal, distinguished Egyptian journalist, the editor of the French daily Le Monde, and many others.

Jack Shaheen, a university professor concerned about Arab portrayal on American television entertainment, described the Arab as portrayed on television entertainment "Hollywood's Nigger."[3] Of course, entertainment programs are meant to be fictional, but the persistence of negative Arab stereotypes in popular novels and television entertainment foretells audience expectations.

These audience expectations are part of a general cultural problem that is too large to be explained in a single dissertation. This study dealt with how the Arab states and Israel were covered on network television news.

Television and Foreign News

Accounts of available sources showed that television news was a major source of information about world events in the United States. There were 73 million U.S. homes (98% of all homes) with television sets in 1979.

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[2] Asharg Al-Awsat, October 2, 1979, p. 5.

[3] Jack Shaheen, "The Television Arab: Hollywood's Nigger," Middle East International, No. 97, April 13, 1979, p. 10.

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The average American home watched television for about six hours and eleven minutes daily.[4]

However, discussion of foreign news on U.S. television can be better understood when discussed more comprehensively as part of U.S. mass media and foreign news. Herbert Gans, a sociologist, wrote that "most foreign news stories fall into seven categories."[5] These categories are:

1. American activities in a foreign country.
2. Foreign activities that affect Americans and American policy.
3. Communist-bloc country activities.
4. Elections and other peaceful changes in government personnel.
5. Political conflict and protest.
6. Disaster.
7. The excesses of dictatorship.[6]

This list is not exhaustive. U.S. mass media in general and television in particular cover foreign events that "deal either with stories thought relevant to Americans or American interests; ...or when the topics are distinctive, with interpretations that apply American values."[7]

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[4]Broadcasting Publishing Inc. Broadcasting Yearbook, (Washington D.C.: Broadcasting Publishing Inc., 1979), p. A-2.

[5]Herbert J. Gans, Deciding What's News, (New York: Pantheon Books, 1979), p. 32.

[6]Ibid., pp. 32-36.

[7]Ibid., p. 37.

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Notwithstanding, foreign events are reported by journalists whose personal values decide what elements of an event to report or ignore, these values may be heavily affected by "the News Organization, rather than being deep-seated individual beliefs or ideologies."[8] While Epstein's assessment could be partly true, Stempel reported that reader interest is one of the major factors of whether or not a news story is used in a newspaper.[9] This may have caused the foreign news "hole" in U.S. mass media to shrink. With the exception of "crisis situations" foreign news is getting less space because editors think that people are interested in local or national news.[10]

Whatever the reasons, John Lent wrote that foreign news reported in U.S. mass media was far less than in other countries.[11] This was also confirmed by George Gerbner and

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[8]Edward Jay Epstein, "The Values of Newsmen, "Television Quarterly, 10:9-20, Winter, 1973, p. 10.

[9]Guido H. Stempel III, "A Factor Analytic Study of Reader Interest in News," Journalism Quarterly, 44:326-330, Summer, 1967.

[10]Wallace Allen, "Foreign News," Editor and Publishers, Vol. 108, July-Dec., 1975, p. 37.

[11]John A. Lent, "Foreign News Content of United States and Asian Print Media: A Litrature Review and Problem Analysis," Gazette, 22:169-182, Fall, 1976.

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George Marvanyi when they compared the foreign news "hole" in three different world political blocs.[12]

Surveys conducted by John Wilhelm and Ralph Kliesch revealed that the number of fulltime U.S. foreign correspondents was 929 in 1969, and 676 in 1975; down about 28 percent. Most of these correspondents report from Western Europe.[13]

Al Hester discovered that the three U.S. television networks --ABC, CBS and NBC-- devoted about a fifth (21.72%) of their daily network evening news to foreign news.[14] He also reported that news from the Middle East ranked third in terms of news time behind Western Europe and Indo-China. That included about a fifth (19.15%) of all foreign news. He also concluded that, ABC, CBS and NBC were "quite similar in giving their emphases to news from geographical areas."[15]

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[12]George Gerbner and George Marvanyi, "The Many Worlds of the World's Press," Journal of Communication, 27:52-66, Winter, 1977.

[13]John Wilhelm, "The World Press Corps Dwindles: A Fifth World Survey of Foreign Correspondents: Paper presented at The Association for Education in Journalism Convention, Carbondale, Ill. August 22, 1972, and Ralph Kliesch, "The Press Corps Abroad Revisited: A Fourth World Survey of Foreign Correspondents," Paper presented at the AEJ Convention, Berkeley, Ca. August 27, 1969, and Ralph Kliesch, in Overseas Press Club Directory, 1975.

[14]Al Hester, "Five Years of Foreign News on U.S. Television Evening Newscasts," Gazette, 24:86-95, Spring, 1978, p. 89.

[15]Ibid.

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While readers' or viewers' interests are often cited by newspaper editors and executive producers on television news as the major reason for the dwindling volume of foreign news from the American mass media, Frank Kaplan questioned the validity of such conclusion. He wrote:

> Perhaps the mere lack of more systematic and balanced approach to overseas reporting is the reason the American public appears not to be interested in international news. But is this really true; is the public disinterested in reports from abroad as U.S. newspaper managers insist is the case and frequently forward as a safe excuse when confronted with the irksome if relevant question of why they don't publish more foreign news? Indications are that such contentions are based on speculation, however, rather than on fact.[16]

Despite such arguments concerning the reasons behind the small percentage of foreign news in U.S. mass media relative to other countries, certain conclusions emerge:

1. U.S. mass media devote less space and time to foreign news compared to other countries.
2. During the 1970s the number of U.S. foreign journalists declined.
3. Western Europe, the communist bloc and the Middle East (in that order) seem to preoccupy the news "hole" allocated to foreign events in the U.S. mass media.
4. The volume of foreign news increases dramatically in cases of crisis, dramatic events or disasters around the world.

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[16]Frank L. Kaplan, "The Plight of Foreign News in the U.S. Mass Media: An Assessment," Gazette, 25:232-243, 1979, p. 239.

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However, the major focus of this study is television news. While television is considered a major source of foreign news in the United States no one knows specifically what attracts people to watching television news.

Various reasons are cited for the popularity of television, although none are conclusive. The visual dimension of television seems to produce a decisive advantage, as Jean Cazeneuve explaines:

> Audio-visual communication, when compared with conceptual communication, reaches the individual more directly and also reaches his sentimentality without passing through his intellect. It is this property which gives television its peculiar grip on people, its power of suggestion and its power to fascinate more than any other medium of communication.[17]

Ithel DeSola Pool states that the appeal and power of television lied in its immediacy, rapidity and ability to transform events into issues on which sides were chosen.[18] Michael Robinson writes that television has had an audio-visual quality that other mass media lack. This "unique quality makes the content of television more memorable and evocative, if not necessarily more persuasive."[19]

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[17]Jean Cazeneuve, "Television and the Human Condition," Communication, 1:192-211, Spring, 1974, p. 206.

[18]Anon, "How Influential is TV News?" Columbia Journalism Review, pp. 19-29, Summer, 1970, p. 21.

[19]Michael J. Robinson, "Television and American Politics," The Public Interest, No. 48, pp. 3-39, Summer, 1977, p. 19.

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Concerning television news Robinson argues that since the adoption of the 30-minute newscast, television has become more thematic than other types of news, thus news items became "stories" that have a didactic conclusion or message.[20]

Available research shows no final conclusions concerning the visual dimension of television. Earling Jourgenson discovered that film produces significantly more information gain than merely broadcasts with still pictures.[21] William Hazard concluded that variation, interest and information gain were determined more by the "perceived meaning" of the news than by the method of presentation. He writes, that whether or not the stories are presented by film, still pictures, or men on the camera, seemed to have no effect on either interest or information gain score.[22] But other research shows that if anything, film on television adds interest urging the audience to "see" events as they unfold in their living rooms.

The Arabs and Israelis have often been "seen" on U.S. network television news. However, there are some indications suggesting a small percentage of the American public know

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[20]Ibid., p. 18.

[21]Referred to by Edwardson et al, "Visualization and TV News Information Gain," Journal of Broadcasting, 20: 373-380, Summer, 1976, p. 374.

[23]William R. Hazard, "On the Impact of Television Pictured News," Journal of Broadcasting, 7:43-51, Winter, 1962-63, p. 51.

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basic facts about the Middle East, let alone the implications and multi-dimensions of the Arab-Israeli conflict.[23]

The Arab-Israeli Conflict and the U.S. Mass Media

The Arab-Israeli conflict actually began after the First World War, but it started to attract the attention of the U.S. media after the Second World War. In 1948 Israel was proclaimed as a Jewish state and was recognized as such by President Harry Truman. These developments occurred against the will of the indigenous Palestinian people and against the acceptance of the Arab masses. Consequently, since 1948, Israel and its Arab neighbors have fought four major wars.

The most recent Arab-Israeli war took place in October 1973. The Western support of Israel provoked the Arab oil producers to embargo oil shipments to any country that actively supported Israel, including the United States. The oil embargo brought a new dimension to the Arab-Israeli conflict. The Arabs and other states discovered the potential effectiveness of a scarce natural resource, such as oil, as a source of new economic diplomacy.

The U.S. mass media have been covering these Middle-Eastern developments since they began. However the intensity

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[23]Marsha McClintock and Daniel Walsh, "Middle America Views the Middle East," The Christian Science Monitor, September 27, 1979, p. 17.

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of that coverage has varied. During a political or military crisis these media rushed in to report what happened. When entrance to one country was difficult, British, Canadian or local journalists were hired to act as stringers. But in the absence of a crisis media coverage kept a rather low-profile. This situation prompted media critics to charge that U.S. mass media coverage of world events tended to be a crisis-oriented.

It is also worth noting that out of about 20 Arab states only two--Egypt and Lebanon--had permanent bureaus by the major U.S. media. Israel on the other hand has had in 1978, permanent bureaus by at least 17 U.S. mass media, including ABC, CBS, NBC, AP, UPI, New York Times and Washington Post.[24]

The 1970s

This study covers ABC's, CBS's and NBC's news reporting about the Arab states and Israel during the 1970s. This decade witnessed major developments which left their imprint on the Arab-Israeli conflict. The sudden death of Jamal Abdul-Nasser, the charismatic Egyptian leader, in 1970 was the kick-off for yet other major events. Three years later, war broke out between Egypt and Syria on one side and Israel on the other. As a result of this war the Arab oil embargo took

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[24] Who is Who in the Foreign Press Association 1978, Tel-Aviv, Israel: Bonstein-Chalif Adv. Ltd., 1978.

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